

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Secretary of Transportation Rodney E. Slater has made revitalization of the nation's Marine Transportation System (MTS) a matter of high priority. Recognizing the challenges of increasing use of our waterways, growing world population and demand for goods, and the increasing globalization of the world economy facing the marine portion of the nation's transportation system, Secretary Slater began the MTS initiative. The goal of this initiative is to ensure that our Nation's waterways, ports and their intermodal connections will meet the needs of the 21st century by providing a safe and environmentally sound world-class system that improves the Nation's global competitiveness and security through improving coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), in conjunction with other federal agencies, held seven Regional Listening Sessions in the spring of 1998 to learn from users, stakeholders, and the public what they perceived to be the current state and future needs of the MTS. These listening sessions provided the input for the National Conference on the Marine Transportation System.

The Conference

The National Conference on the Marine Transportation System was hosted by Secretary Slater on November 17 - 19, 1998 at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia. After a series of keynote and background resource speakers, the conference participants worked alternately in issue breakout groups and plenary sessions. In the plenary sessions, the conference participants addressed two overarching issues: a shared national vision for the MTS and public and private coordination of MTS activities. There were five breakout groups that used various facilitated approaches to identify the issues, create goals and develop recommendations to achieve these goals in the areas of safety, competitiveness, infrastructure, environment and security. On the final day of the conference, a stakeholder spokesman from each issue group presented the recommended actions and goals to a leadership report-out panel.

Recommendations

The National Conference on the Marine Transportation System addressed the issues of a shared national MTS vision and public and private coordination, as well as developing recommendations for specific goals in the areas of safety, competitiveness, infrastructure, environment and security.

Vision

The conference participants created the following vision statement:

The U.S. Marine Transportation System will be the world's most technologically advanced, safe, secure, efficient, effective, accessible, globally competitive, dynamic and environmentally responsible system for moving goods and people.

The complete vision document includes a comprehensive description of the desired MTS in 2020 expressed in terms of desired capabilities.

This vision will be guided by the following principles:

- ◆ Shared responsibility and accountability.
- ◆ Federal leadership.
- ◆ A balance between diverse interests.
- ◆ System integration.
- ◆ Technology deployment.
- ◆ People are critical to success.

Coordination and Leadership

Coordination, leadership, and cooperation are essential to the success of the MTS. With effective MTS coordination, the nation's mobility, safety, economic health, natural environment and security can all be enhanced. Raising the visibility of the MTS will encourage cooperation and information sharing among regional, federal and local agencies, as well as private sector owners and operators. This kind of coordinated approach can more effectively address the needs of the MTS than piecemeal efforts by individual groups. Two key recommendations were:

- ◆ Establish a National Council on Marine Transportation with responsibilities to support and coordinate development of a national MTS strategy and policy.
- ◆ Create local/regional committees to build grass roots support of the MTS and to address MTS issues and recommend improvements.

Safety

The MTS is a complex, dynamic system with a variety of users. The safety and education of all system users is of critical importance in reducing damage to vessels, property, and the environment, and to preventing injuries and saving lives.

As the number of both commercial and recreational system users continues to grow, and both categories of watercraft increase in size and speed, technology and training must be utilized to increase the safety of our MTS. Recommended goals include:

- ◆ Widespread use of Safety Management Systems in design and operations.
- ◆ Accurate, reliable and real-time information management systems that are tailored to user needs.
- ◆ Improved management and coordination to promote safe movements and facility siting.
- ◆ Improved management of operations and communications in congested areas.
- ◆ Prevention of maritime accidents associated with human factors.

Competitiveness

The U.S. Marine Transportation System is our main gateway to the rest of the global marketplace. The following actions are necessary:

- ◆ Provide MTS funding to maintain and improve U.S. competitiveness.
- ◆ Focus public awareness on the economic importance of the MTS and the need for MTS investments.
- ◆ Foster and fund resources and institutions for MTS research, recruitment and education.
- ◆ Form public/private cooperatives in areas such as planning information and research.

Infrastructure

The physical and information-handling infrastructure, that supports our MTS, must be maintained and upgraded to respond to changes in vessel design, technology, and trade patterns. Key infrastructure concerns include:

- ◆ Channel dimensions suitable for modern vessels.
- ◆ Lock and dam adequacy and maintenance.
- ◆ Port productivity, intermodal connections and land side access (rail & highway).
- ◆ Better use of the existing MTS capacity through improved vessel traffic control.

Security

The MTS serves a crucial role in the security and defense of the United States. It is important to assure the availability and security of the MTS infrastructure to support mobilization requirements. This effort can be assisted by ensuring that the general public, the private sector, and the state and local governments understand the importance of the MTS to our national security interests.

To improve the physical security, the MTS must focus on preventing and detecting smuggling, theft, illegal immigration and other criminal activities. In addition, the vulnerability to terrorism must be evaluated, contingency plans must be prepared and the capability to respond must be developed.

Environment

The waterways and adjacent shorelines that comprise the MTS are a national environmental treasure, which are a natural habitat for numerous species of both plants and animals.

It is critical that any improvements envisioned for the MTS consider the impact the improvements will have on competitiveness, safety, security, and other MTS aspects, and seek a balance with their impact on this valuable ecosystem.

Conclusion

The leadership report-out panel, lead by Secretary Slater, included Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Robert L. Mallett; Under Secretary of Agriculture, Michael V. Dunn; Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Dr. Joseph W. Westphal; and Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Ms. Dana Minerva.

In remarking on the report-out presentations, the resounding consensus of the leadership panel was that the conference was definitely a step in the right direction and in addressing the right issues.

Secretary Slater's remarks included the statement, " ... because of what you have done here at this conference, we are several giant steps ... closer to make sure that the Marine Transportation System is ready as an integral part of our nation's transportation system. We now have the beginning of a powerful vision ... I think that it is a vision that will command the respect and the attention ... of those who serve in the Executive Branch ... [and] the Congress.